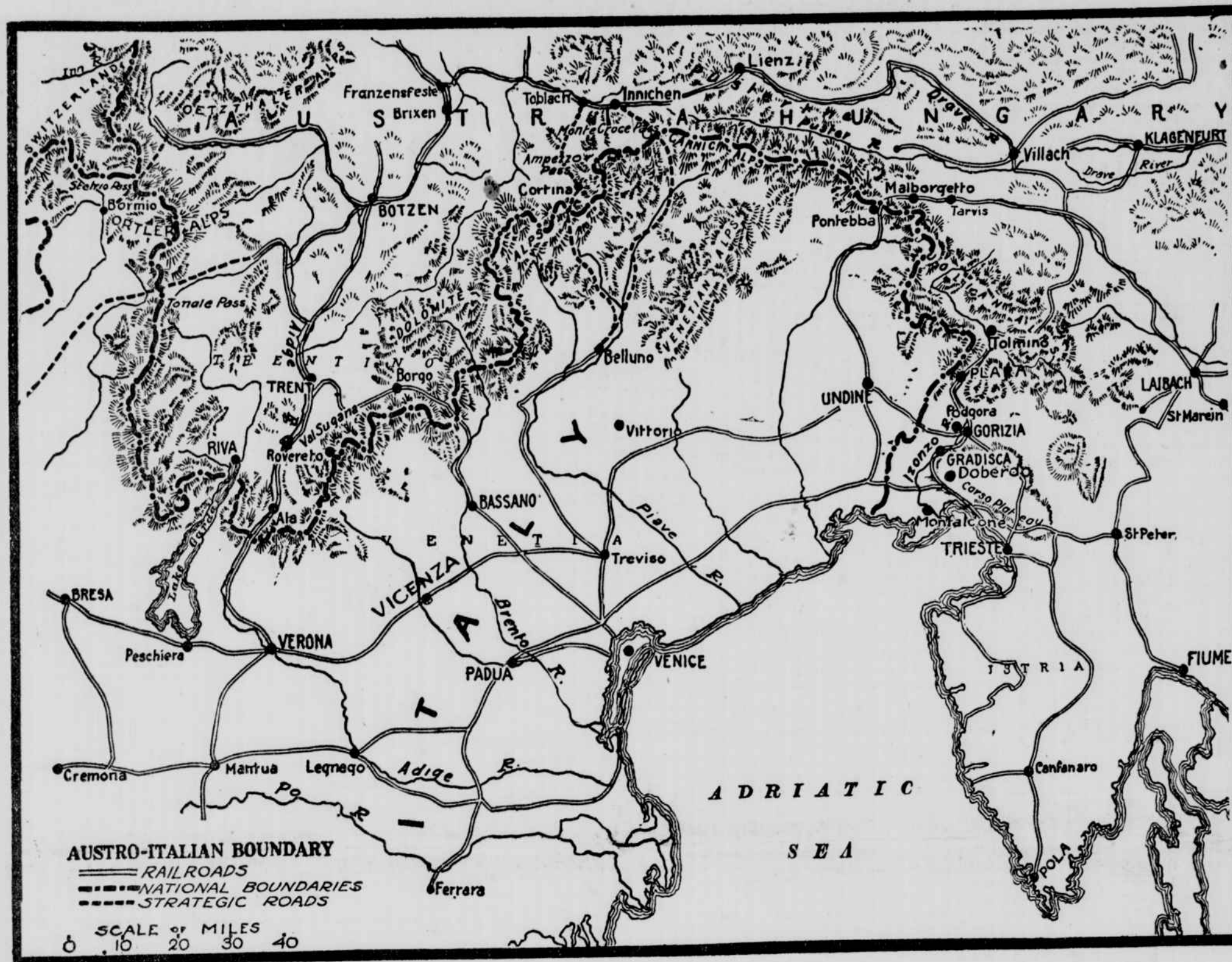


## GORIZIA—AN AUSTRIAN THERMOPYLAE

Bridgehead on the Isonzo Which the Italian Armies Have at Last Forced.

By FRANK H. SIMONDS,  
Author of "The Great War."

## THE AUSTRO-ITALIAN FRONT.



Italy's First Great Victory in Modern History Marks a Restored Nation.

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does get twenty miles east then it will spread like a tidal wave that has cut through a dike, and the Austrians, pressed as they are by the Russians, have not the men to hold wide-stretching lines.

## Italy's First Great Modern Victory.

As it stands the Italians have won the first great victory in their modern history. Hitherto they have gained freedom and then a reunited country through the aid of other nations, of France first and then of Prussia, while their own troops have fought gallantly rather than successfully and known defeats rather than victories. In Italian history the August days that saw the fall of Gorizia will be landmarks and may very well stand for the completion of that great work of restoring Italy which was undertaken almost a century ago, on the very morning after the Congress of Vienna had turned Italy over to her ancient masters and denied her the liberty she longed for.

By winning this victory Italy has made a notable contribution to the Allied cause. She has taken 15,000 prisoners and she has captured guns and material and inflicted casualties many times greater upon Austria at the moment when Austria was suffering terrible reverses in another field and needing all her reserves to man the Carpathian lines and stop the Russian advance along the Dniester and toward the Bug. If Italy is to be stopped it will require fresh troops, and the question may be fairly raised whether Austria can long find fresh troops to balance her terrible losses, which in prisoners alone have passed the 400,000 mark in the last two and a half months.

And, too, the moral effect in Vienna and Berlin of the Italian success cannot be exaggerated. Three months ago the German and Austrian papers in recounting the successes of the Austrians along the Trentine front were forecasting the collapse of Italy and the outbreak of a revolution resulting from popular discontent and disillusionment. But such revolutions are not the concomitants of victory, and while the Austrian invasion has ended the Italian people are celebrating the first great Italian victory of modern history in the spirit that the French greeted—without celebrating—their deliverance at the Marne.

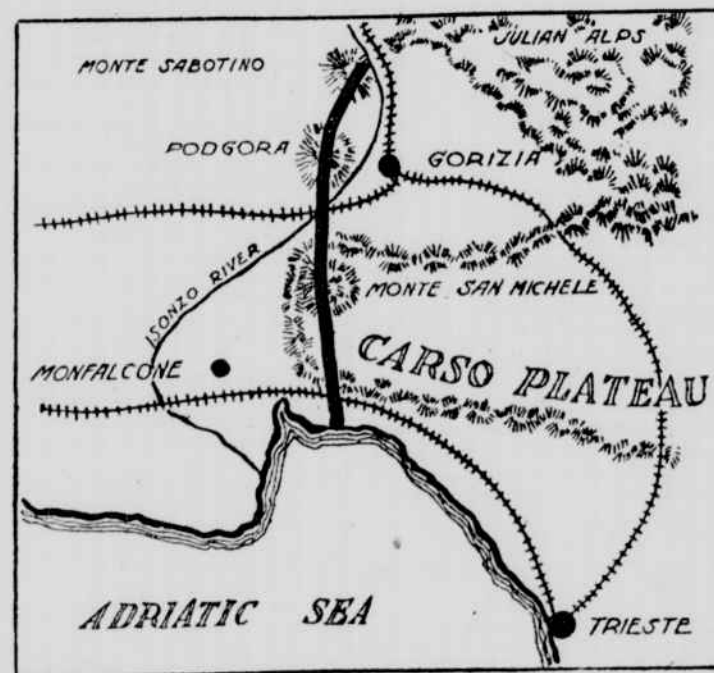
## The Synchronized Attack.

Again, the Italian victory supplies one more detail in the picture of a great, combined and synchronized attack upon the lines of the besieged Central Powers; it coincides with new Russian victories; it gives new encouragement to the enemies of Germany, new strength to the Allies, new promise of ultimate victory and even early Austrian collapse.

It may be several weeks before we shall know whether the victory of Gorizia settled the fate of Trieste and opened the road to a real invasion of Austria from the west. Despite the familiar phrases, the modern "thrust" moves terribly slowly and troops are "hurled" at a snail's pace. But the moral effect, as contrasted with the military effect, is instantly apparent and can hardly be exaggerated. Nor can one fail to reckon its influence in Bucharest, where Rumanian statesmen are only waiting until the moment is ripe for an attack upon Austria, or in Sofia, where Bulgarian statesmen are daily counting the costs of their Teutonic alliance with increasing anxiety.

Go back to last summer and fall, when the stream of victories of the Central Powers seemed inexhaustible and victory followed victory with monotony, and then the change in twelve months is unmistakable. The Italian victory has cut another fragment from the war map of Bethmann-Hollweg; it has added a new and heavy burden to all the other burdens the Hapsburg monarchy is carrying. It is not Waterloo, it is not Leipsic; but it may prove to be another Baylen, which was the first authentic sign of the crumbling of the Napoleonic prestige.

And the Italian victory should direct attention once more to the Balkans, where a new storm is gathering. At three of the four points the Allied offensive is now at work. Italian and Russian victories are steadily recalling Austrian and German troops from the Balkan peninsula. Before Salonica 700,000 Allied troops are ready and waiting. We may yet see the most dramatic and important campaign of the year along the Vardar and not on the Somme, the Isonzo or even the Dniester.



The Gorizia Bridgehead.

could and attempt to hold a new line from the sea to the Alps, if such a line existed and could be made good. For bear in mind that while the Italians had taken the Gorizia bridgehead and got inside the Gorizia gateway they had not got all the way through, and the narrow neck between the sea and the Alps continues east and west for some miles. It was as if, having forced the door, the Italians had entered a long vestibule through which they must pass before they could get to the point where they could begin to use superior numbers.

## A Summer's Job.

Now, writing on Tuesday, August 15, it is not yet clear whether the Italians have actually got all the way through the Gorizia gateway—that is, to the end of the vestibule—or the Austrians have been able to rally behind a second line, still resting upon the mountains and the sea, before which the Italians will have to halt and begin all over again. We can safely conclude that such a position will not be nearly as strong as the Gorizia line, but it may be strong enough to compel the Italians to wait until their heavy artillery gets up and then begin a new blasting operation.

Such delay will enable the Austrians to construct a second and a third line, and it may be a summer's job still for the Italians to get all the way through this gateway and into the wider space to the east, where the sea falls away from the mountains. Everything that one can now see suggests this, although the Italians are pressing on and are already half a dozen miles east of Gorizia. This is the old story of trench war; this is the story of Verdun, where the Germans broke through the first French line and ultimately the second, but did not actually pierce all the French lines, and where they had presently to halt before the new lines that the French constructed behind the broken line.

We can see now that if the Italians can keep on for ten or at most twenty miles due east they will be beyond the Gorizia Thermopylae, and if they are able to get south as well as east twenty miles they will have Trieste, for they are only twenty miles from it now. But twenty miles is a very big advance in trench war, and neither the French nor the Germans have made such a gain since the beginning of the war of trenches in the west. It is a matter of life and death for the Austrians to hold up the Italian advance, for if it

the Austrians had come. Until this was done there was no justification for any renewal of the effort to force the Gorizia gateway.

## The Sudden Thrust.

But by the first week of August this work must have been finished to Italian satisfaction, for we had suddenly the outbreak of a new and tremendous Italian thrust straight through the Gorizia gateway, which, thanks to the accumulation of ammunition and the acquisition of heavy artillery, succeeded this time, and by August 7 Italian troops were in Gorizia and Italy had "redeemed" the first considerable town in her long lost Irredenta.

The actual operation was simple in the extreme. First the Italians bombarded the whole front from the Alps to the sea for many hours, the usual prelude to an offensive in trench war. Then they concentrated their fire on Sabotino and San Michele, north and south of Podgora and of Gorizia. Finally they sent their infantry up the slopes of these hills, took the Austrian trenches and some thousands of prisoners and thus held both sides of the gate. They looked down on Gorizia and their guns commanded the rear of Podgora Hill and the bridges leading from Gorizia across the Isonzo.

There was nothing for the Austrians to do, then, but get east as fast as they

ing away off along the Isonzo in front of Gorizia. About June 1 the Italian outlook was frankly gloomy, and an Italian ministry fell as a result of the failure of the Italian troops to hold back the storm.

Conceivably the Austrians might have got all the way down into the Italian plain if they had been permitted to go on unmolested at any other point, but on June 1 Russia began her tremendous drive against the eastern lines, that Austria had thinned to get the men to attack Italy. When these lines collapsed, as they promptly did, there was nothing for Austria to do but call back her troops from the Italian field and set them to work stopping the Russian flood. Her own back door, the road over the Carpathians, was now in danger, and she had to desist from her efforts to force the rear entrance to Italy.

Saved from a real peril, the first task for Italy was plainly to stop up the roads by which the Austrians had come almost to the Italian plain, win back the hills and trenches that the Austrians had taken and obtain positions which would enable her to make a new effort to seal up this Trentine entrance to her own house. And all through June and July this was what Italy was doing, and we had steady reports of the recoil of the Austrians and the slow but sure advance of Italy up the Adige and Brenta valleys and over the

passes between the two valleys, by which

because Austria was busy elsewhere, she was able to send her troops up the shores of Lago di Garda almost to Riva, up the Adige Valley almost to Rovereto and up the Brenta to Borgo. But she did not succeed in getting to Trent. Could she have done this she would actually have put a cork in the neck of the Trentine bottle and would have had no further worry about her back door. She could then have turned to the main business of forcing the Gorizia gateway. She was stopped, however, by the Austrian defences before and well south of Trent.

Still, having barricaded the back door as best she could, Italy turned to the Isonzo, to the Gorizia gateway, and began hammering on it. But she made very little progress. Her experience was exactly the same as that of her allies who tried to force the German lines in France. She, too, still lacked the heavy artillery and the ammunition.

Accordingly, having made a little progress, Italy was held up. She made desperate efforts at the time Russia was in straits last September and again when Austria was sending troops to the Balkans to blast a way through Serbia to the Golden Horn. But, despite terrible losses, she could not get forward and she did not prevent the destruction of Serbia. This is the history of Italian effort to get through the Gorizia gateway from the first days of the war well into last winter.

## Through the Back Door.

Meantime Austria had got most of her troops back from the Balkans, and winter, by paralyzing Russia, permitted her temporarily to withdraw troops from the eastern front as Germany was withdrawing them for her Verdun operation. By this means Austria collected a powerful army in the Trentine region, furnished it with vast masses of heavy artillery and, a little after Germany began her attack upon Verdun, Austria attempted to blast her way through the barricades Italy had thrown up at her own back door and thus get down into the Italian plain.

And for two months the Austrians were very successful. They drove the Italians down the Adige and Brenta valleys and, coming over the higher passes between them, began to sift into Italian territory and to get to the last foothills of the mountains, within sight of Vicenza and the railroads and roads which were vital to the existence of the Italian armies fighting

by another very serious difficulty. When the treaty of 1866 gave Italy her present frontiers it left to Austria the complete possession of that Trentine district which projects like a peninsula deep into Italian territory and almost embraces the whole of Venetia. In the centre of this Trentine peninsula, to continue the figure, is the valley of the Adige River, down which comes a great trunk railroad, crossing the Brenner Pass to the north of Bolzano and entering Italian territory a little north of the city of Verona.

This is the historic route by which Northern invaders have again and again descended into Italy, and Austria retained this route, with the Italian speaking districts about the city of Trent, solely for the purpose of being able, in case of war with Italy, to pour her troops down this funnel. She had guarded it with forts and had rendered it actually one fortress projecting into Italy.

## The Austrian Threat.

Just at the city of Trent this route divides into three, thus offering its possessors three different roads into the Italian plain, one coming down the shores of Lago di Garda, another coming straight down the Adige Valley to Verona and a third coming round the Brenta Valley and thus into the plain near the city of Vicenza.

Now look at the map and you will see that if the Austrians coming down these routes were able to overflow into Italian territory but a few miles they would get possession of the only railroads that lead from Italy eastward to the Gorizia gateway and to Austria. Hence if Italy undertook to attack the Gorizia position before she had closed the back door entrance into her own house her armies going eastward to Gorizia would have their rail and road communications cut off and would either have to cut their way out and back south of the Po or else they would be captured. And if Austria once cleared Venetia of Italian troops she could stand behind the Po and the Mincio, which comes out of the rest of Austria and invested and captured by siege. Trieste is an Italian city by population, although belonging to Austria, and it was to get Trieste, together with the Trentino, that Italy came into the war more than a year ago. Austria, determined to hold Trieste, had this second reason for holding on to the death to her Gorizia position.

But the Italian strategy was complicated

## Geography of the Isonzo.

The geography of this strip of land between the sea and the Alps is easy to grasp. Coming down out of the Julian Alps, the Isonzo River touches the Venetian plain less than thirty miles from its own mouth. As it comes out of the gorge it washes by Monte Sabotino, which is on its western bank. A little to the south it touches the foot of Podgora Hill, also to the west, flowing still to the south, but now on the eastern bank it touches the foot of the Carso Plateau, which crowds it westward in a wide curve before it falls into the sea through a swampy mouth similar to those of most Northern Italian rivers that enter the Adriatic.

Above Monte Sabotino the character of the country is such that it is practically impossible for an invading army coming up out of the Venetian plain to force its way into Austria, although Napoleon did go this way in his campaign that took him to Leoben and ended in the treaty of Campo Formio. Now, however, modern artillery has closed this route absolutely. Thus, when the Austrians had built permanent trench lines, not old-fashioned forts, on Monte Sabotino, on Podgora Hill and on the western edge of the Carso Plateau, which bears the name of Monte San Michele, they had a fortified position quite comparable to the ancient Thermopylae.

## The Gorizia Bridgehead.

Eastward from Podgora Hill and across the Isonzo is the little city of Gorizia, Italian in character and population, despite Slav elements, but retained by Austria in the treaty of 1866, and a portion of Italy's Irredenta. Under cover of Podgora Hill several bridges, one carrying the main railroad going west into Italy, cross the Isonzo. Holding Podgora Hill, the Austrians held both ends of the bridges, and this explains the military term, Gorizia bridgehead, which has become familiar in recent days. The French, holding the Meuse Hills on the opposite side of the river from the Verdun citadel, held a similar bridgehead and the Germans usually speak of the French position as the Verdun bridgehead.

When Italy entered the war she had many more troops available than Austria, which was fighting Russia and Serbia, as well, could spare to hold the Western front. But Italy could not use her superiority in numbers until she had broken into Austria through the narrow Gorizia gateway. Once through this gateway she would find plenty of room to deploy her masses and Austria could not meet them with equal numbers. It was then the sole purpose of Austrian strategy to hold this Gorizia position and keep Italy in a position where she could not use her greater numbers with inevitable consequences to Austria.

A secondary, but in Italian eyes a vital, consideration was the fact that once she had got through the Gorizia gateway Italy would be in the rear of the great part of Trieste, which could be cut off from the rest of Austria and invested and captured by siege. Trieste is an Italian city by population, although belonging to Austria, and it was to get Trieste, together with the Trentino, that Italy came into the war more than a year ago. Austria, determined to hold Trieste, had this second reason for holding on to the death to her Gorizia position.